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ABSTRACT

Study habits and attitudes of American Indian students were related to classroom achievement and classroom behaviors, and strategies for improving study skills and attitudes were discussed. The Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes Form H (SSHA) was administered to 160 American Indian students in grades 7 through 12 at a reserve school in Manitoba, Canada. Classroom achievement and behavior were measured by teacher ratings of student academic achievement, cooperation, and work habits. The SSHA was found to be valid and reliable for use with Indian students. Poor study habits and poor study attitudes, especially in the junior high school years and among boys, were found to be related to teacher ratings of lower achievement, less cooperation, and poorer work habits. Low scores on SSHA scales indicated needs for more Indian teachers and role models, relevance in school curriculum, and help with time management and study skills. Improved teacher referrals, better feedback to teachers about student needs, and use of the SSHA to identify students needing assistance were additional suggestions to counselors working to improve American Indian student achievement and to prevent American Indian students from dropping out. A 14-item list of references is appended. (LFL)

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Study Habits and Attitudes of American Indian Students: Implications for Counselor Involvement

Abstract

The study habits of American Indian students were at the lowest quartile at the junior high school level. Strategies for counselor involvement based on the findings are discussed.

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Study Habits and Attitudes of Indian Students: Implications for Counselor Involvement

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Nationally, 25% of all students fail to graduate from high school (Gardner, 1983). Even this appalling statistic pales when one considers that even higher dropout rates occur among certain minority groups. Dropout rates, for example, in many Indian schools are as high as 40% in the junior high school years and 60% in the senior high school years (Coladarci, 1983; Blinkhorn, 1981). And, even for those Indian students who stay in school, absenteeism, disciplinary problems, and poor motivation remain very high (Colardarci, 1983).

Elliot and Wendling (1966) noted that 75% of academic failure in high school is the result of poor study and examination habits. They further pointed out that 75% of the students who dropout of high school had the ability to do passing or even superior achievement.

Many possible reasons for the high dropout rate and for poor achievement among Indian students have been advanced (Coladarci, 1983; Blinkhorn, 1981). These reasons range from economic and sociological factors to school policies. Despite the high dropout rate and low

achievement, little study has been made about the study habits and attitudes of Indian students using a standardized instrument.

A major purpose of this present study was to provide comparison data about the study habits and attitudes of American Indian students. Another purpose of the study was to determine the relationship of the SSHA scores to classroom achievement and classroom behaviors. A final purpose of the study was to discuss implications of the findings for counselor involvement in the area of study habits and attitudes with American Indian students.

Method

Subjects

Subjects of this study consisted of 160 Indian students enrolled in grades 7-12 at a reserve school in Manitoba, Canada. This school is under local Indian control and students are members of the Plains Cree and Saulteaux tribes. The school district enrolled 635 students from grades kindergarten to grade twelve. Forty percent of the faculty were American Indians. The sample consisted of 160 students in attendance on the testing dates or 71 percent of the total enrollment of 226 students in grades 7-12. Daily attendance in these grades averaged 72 percent of the total enrollment. The sample consisted of 96 students in grades 7-9 (64 girls and 32 boys) and 64 students in grades 10-12 (32 girls and 32 boys).

Instrument and Procedure

The Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes Form H (SSHA) (Brown & Holtzman, 1967) was administered by the senior author to all grades 7-12 students in attendance on the day of the examination.

The SSHA is one of the most popularly used study skills instrument and it has been normed on over 11,000 students in thirteen school systems. The relationship of the total score of the SSHA and grade point averages range from a correlation of .46 in grade 12 to .55 in grade 7. Four week interval test-retest reliability for the SSHA range between .93 to .95 (Morris, 1961). There are seven scales on the SSHA: Delay Avoidance (a measure of the degree to which a student is prompt in completing assignments and efficient in time management); Work Methods (a measure of effective use of study skills); Teacher Approval (a measure of student opinions about teacher classroom behavior and methods); Education Acceptance (a measure of student approval of educational objectives, practices, and requirements). The Study Habits scale is a combined score of the Delay Avoidance and Work Methods scales while the Study Attitudes scale combines the scores of the Teacher Approval and Education Acceptance scales. The Study Orientation scale is an overall measure of a students study habits and attitudes.

Classroom achievement and behaviors were measured by teacher ratings of student academic achievement, cooperation, and work habits. Thirteen classroom teachers independently rated the students on three 5 point scales: Academic Achievement was rated "1" if poor to "5" if outstanding, Cooperative was rated "1" if very uncooperative to

"5" if very cooperative, and Work Habits were rated "1" if needs much improvement to "5" if the student was very efficient. All teacher ratings were averaged to determine final scores on each of the three scales.

Statistical Analysis

Means and standard deviations were computed for each of the seven SSHA scales and for the three teacher rating scales. t-tests were computed comparing boys and girls. An intercorrelational matrix was constructed from all the scales. Finally, SSHA scores for the sample were converted to percentile scores and compared with the normative data reported in the SSHA manual.

Results

Compared to the percentile norms found in the SSHA manual, Indian girls in the 7-9th grades were at about the 35 percentile on overall study orientation while the boys were only at the 15th percentile. The girls scores ranged from about the 50th percentile on use of good work methods to the 25th percentile on acceptance of educational objectives and practices. The boys at this level scored only at about the 10th percentile on acceptance of educational objectives and practices to about the 30th percentile on use of good work and study methods. At the 10-12 grade level the girls scored overall at about the 55th percentile while the boys were at about the 45th percentile. The girls were near average or slightly above average on all scales. The boys were at about the 40th percentile on

avoiding procrastination and on acceptance of educational policies and near average on all the other scales.

A comparison of the means of the SSHA scales showed that the girls scored significantly higher than boys ($p. < .05$) on all seven scales of the SSHA. The girls were also rated by the classroom teachers as being significantly higher on all three of the classroom behaviors of academic achievement, cooperativeness, and work habits.

The SSHA scales appear to possess adequate internal consistency for use with an American Indian student population and the four basic scales (Delay Avoidance, Work Methods, Teacher Approval, and Education Acceptance) correlated between .79 and .93 with the total Study Orientation score.

The final focus of this study was on the relationship of the SSHA scores to the three teacher ratings of student academic achievement, cooperativeness, and work habits. It was found that there was a significant but low correlation of about .30 for each of these three scales and the SSHA scales indicating some concurrent validity for the use of the SSHA with this type of population and a possible explanation of the study skills factors involved in poor student achievement and classroom behavior.

Discussion

This study represents one of the few reported investigations about the study habits and attitudes of American Indian students. The results provide data on American Indian's study habits for comparisons with the normative data found in the manual of the SSHA.

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These data may help further the use of the SSHA or other such inventories with minority school youth. Although the findings are limited to only one sample, the study can be used in a preliminary way to help counselors and educators analyze Indian students' study habits and attitudes. The results indicate that the SSHA possesses adequate concurrent validity and internal scale reliability for use with Indian youth.

This study has shown that poor study habits and poor study attitudes especially in the junior high school years and among boys are related to teacher ratings of lower achievement, less cooperation, and poorer work habits.

What can school counselors do to help American Indian youth improve their study habits and attitudes? First, it is important to accept the viewpoint that study habits and attitudes involve the total school faculty not just classroom teachers. On this point, Garni (1980) has urged school counselors to assume a preventive role in reducing student attrition by becoming proactive rather than remedial. This is particularly an important position when one considers the much higher dropout rates of Indian youth. More specifically, Lander (1981) has promoted "intrusive counseling" where counselors become more actively and collaboratively involved with teachers' classroom efforts. Along these same lines, McKinnon and Kiraly (1984) have described strategies, methods, and program combining cognitive and affective learning in the classroom to produce more relevant student learning, more student self-control, and greater respect toward teachers and classmates.

The low scores on the Teacher Approval scale at the junior high school level and particularly among the boys indicates that these youth had poor opinions of teachers and their classroom behavior and methods. More recruitment of Indian teachers and counselors may help Indian youth identify with more relevant faculty role models. Counselors can invite back to school former students who can give testimony to junior high students that good study habits and attitudes are valuable tools for life's success. Counselors can also play a leadership role in promoting multi-cultural education and human relations training.

The low scores on the Education Acceptance scale at the junior high school level suggests that these youth have become turned off by school objectives, practices and requirements. Counselors can use the results of this study to show administrators and teachers the continuing need to promote relevance in the school curriculum like that advocated by the career education movement. Again, affective education strategies and materials can improve student acceptance of cognitive learnings.

The below average scores on the Delay Avoidance and Work Methods scales, particularly at the junior high level, are further indicators that these students need help with time management and study skills. Counselors can use "time budget sheets" (Miller, 1973) to graphically introduce students to the concept of more effective use of their time. Counselors can also introduce students to the SQ3R method of study developed by Robinson (1970).

Presnell (1980) has described how counselors can improve teacher referral rates of students by stressing better counselor-teacher relations and better feedback to teachers about student needs. Indian youth are often too shy and reluctant to make self-referrals for counseling and the teacher referral process may be the best means of starting student contacts. A good beginning for counseling with Indian youth is to focus on academic concerns. Academic difficulties are a common experience for many Indian youth and a wise procedure for developing rapport may be to focus first on positive study skills and attitudes. Later, as Castagna and Codd (1984) describe, a counselor can focus on motivational and personal problems which may be interactive with poor study habits and attitudes.

The administration and interpretation of the SSHA by itself can be a useful study skills aid for Indian youth, especially at the junior high school level. The survey can be administered early in the school year and therefore be used as a screening instrument to identify students who may need immediate assistance and counseling. The Diagnostic Profile can be given to each individual student to pin point specific areas of skill difficulties. Students can also examine their responses to individual statements which make up each SSHA subscale. A special Counseling Key can be laid over student answer sheets and identify specific statements which represent poor study habits or attitudes that may be contributing to a student's academic difficulties.

It became apparent from the results of this study that many junior high school students can benefit from study skills help. In addition to individual counseling the SSHA can also be used in the classroom in semester long study skills courses, brief units in regular subject fields, or during homeroom periods. In conclusion, American Indian students in increasing numbers are attending postsecondary educational institutions (Chavers, 1982). Good study habits and attitudes seem needed if these students are to academically survive in higher education. This study indicates that junior high school age youth, especially boys, have poor attitudes about their school and their teachers and also have poor study habits and skills. This paper has described how counselors of American Indian students can play an important proactive role in promoting study skills use in the classroom and through individual counseling strategies.

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